



LOCAL FOODS, LOCAL PLACES

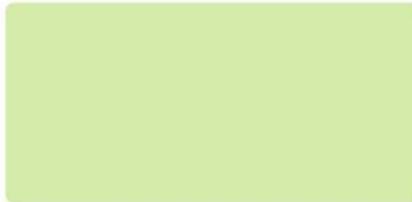
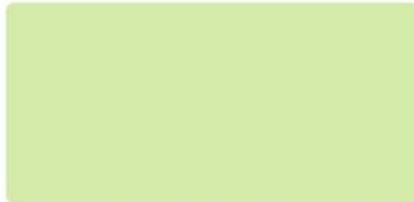


Local Foods, Local Places

An Action Plan for
Tuskegee, Alabama



October 7, 2015



Community Story

The City of Tuskegee, Alabama (population 9,865) is the County seat of rural Macon County (population 20,000). Sitting halfway between Montgomery and Columbus along US Highway 80, Tuskegee is in the eastern edge of the Alabama Black Belt: a large region of the Southeast shaped by an agricultural economy that was historically dominated by cotton and has the sociocultural and economic legacy of African-American slavery. Today, Tuskegee is 98% African-American, while Macon County is 86%. The City is proud to be the home of Tuskegee University (TU), a historically black college founded by Booker T. Washington in 1881, which has produced great thought leaders and innovators such as George Washington Carver. Macon County is home to the Tuskegee Human and Civil Rights Museum, the Tuskegee National Forest, and Moton Field, the former training base of the Tuskegee Airmen. The City and County's histories are intertwined with agricultural traditions, education, innovation, self-reliance, as well as the trials and tribulations that come with the legacy of slavery and later the Civil Rights Movement. Independence, resiliency, and sustainability are part of Tuskegee's culture, and yet the City and County are largely rural, and characterized by population decline, economic hardship, and poverty. Macon is one of two counties in the state of Alabama listed for five consecutive years as "severely distressed," with many families in need of basic necessities such as healthy food, health care, and economic opportunities.

In July 2014, a group of community leaders working with distressed communities partnered with the City of Tuskegee, the principle land grant universities of the region, and other partners in Macon and Lee counties to submit an application for technical assistance from the federal Local Foods, Local Places program¹. The community partners, listed in Figure 1 expressed their desire to pursue implementation of a plan for economic development and food security through downtown revitalization and regional marketing. They called their initiative "Made in Macon, Homegrown in Tuskegee," which expressed a strong desire to promote local foods, enhance the downtown Farmers Market and main streets, and extend access to local healthy foods for all in Tuskegee, Alabama and the surrounding region.

¹ http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/announcement_-_local_foods_local_places_2014_final.pdf
<http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/sp-local-foods-local-places.html>

Key Initiative Partners

LFLP APPLICATION PARTNERS

- Mobile Studio
- Auburn University
- Tuskegee---Macon County Community Development Corporation (TMCCDC)
- Tuskegee University, Carver Integrative Sustainability Center (CISC)
- Food Bank of East Alabama (FBEA)
- Macon County Famers Market, Tuskegee (MCFM)
- Auburn University Food Systems Institute, and College of Human Sciences, Nutrition and College of Agriculture, Agriculture Economics and Rural Sociology

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

- Tuskegee Youth Safe Haven (TYSF)
- Macon County Public Schools, School Gardens Program
- Tuskegee Farmers Conference (TFC)
- The Ridge Interpretive Center, Warrior Stand, Alabama (RIC)
- Shiloh Community Restoration Foundation, Notasulga, Alabama (SCRF)
- Macon County Minister's Council (MCMC)
- Tuskegee Main Street Organization (TMSO)
- Tuskegee Housing Authority
- Tuskegee United Leadership and Innovation Program (TULIP)
- National Park Service (NPS)

Figure 1 - Key Initiative Partners (see Appendix C for a list of workshop attendees).

The application was endorsed by the Tuskegee City Council, Mayor Johnny Ford, and the Macon County Commission.

Macon County Alabama is a USDA-designated StrikeForce county at the eastern edge of the Alabama Black Belt, and is included in both the Appalachian Regional Commission and the Delta Regional Authority's jurisdiction. The application for technical assistance clearly articulated that the community had many of the key ingredients for both collaboration and success, and had a real need. The application requested technical and financial resources to support the county's vision of becoming a local leader in equal access to fresh local foods, entrepreneurial opportunities,



Figure 2 – Daniel, Ervin and Jason In conversation outside of the Carver Integrative Sustainability Center (Credit: Alan Steinbeck)

and a vibrant downtown. They were awarded LFLP technical assistance in the fall of 2015 and began the process thereafter. The remainder of this report documents the engagement process, workshop activities, and the action plan for next steps.

Macon County Food Assessment and the Moveable Feast

Mobile Studio is a traveling, interdisciplinary arts and design studio that studies, interprets, and transforms landscapes with communities in Alabama and beyond. It is co-founded and directed by Jocelyn Zanzot and Daniel Neil. The studio works, in collaboration and co-creation with diverse communities, towards optimum health and creative place making. Working at multiple scales, the studio creates new models of civic engagement, enhances centers of creative economy, and builds new public landscapes of civic health and delight.

Mobile Studio collaborated on the 2014 Food Security Assessment for Macon County with colleagues in Rural Sociology, Agricultural Economics and Nutrition at Auburn University, as well as the Tuskegee University National Center for Bioethics in Research and Healthcare. The objectives were to better understand the stories behind the statistics of food security in Macon County, and to develop a more robust assessment tool that can help strengthen existing food security networks. One of the immediate goals of the research is to use the findings to inform regional, statewide and national food policy councils, as well as research and action oriented initiatives. A longer-term goal is to plan and design solutions that improve local food system infrastructure. The Mobile Studio itself has become a new model for interdisciplinary, community-centered partnership for enhancing local food systems.

Engagement Process

The technical assistance engagement process conducted for LFLP has three phases, illustrated in Figure 3 below. The assessment phase consisted of three preparation conference calls with the workshop planning committee that worked to articulate the workshop goal and agenda, logistics and stakeholder invitation lists. The Convening phase included the effort's keystone event: a two-day workshop held in the community. The next steps phase included a series of three follow-up conference calls, as well as process-reporting and documentation.

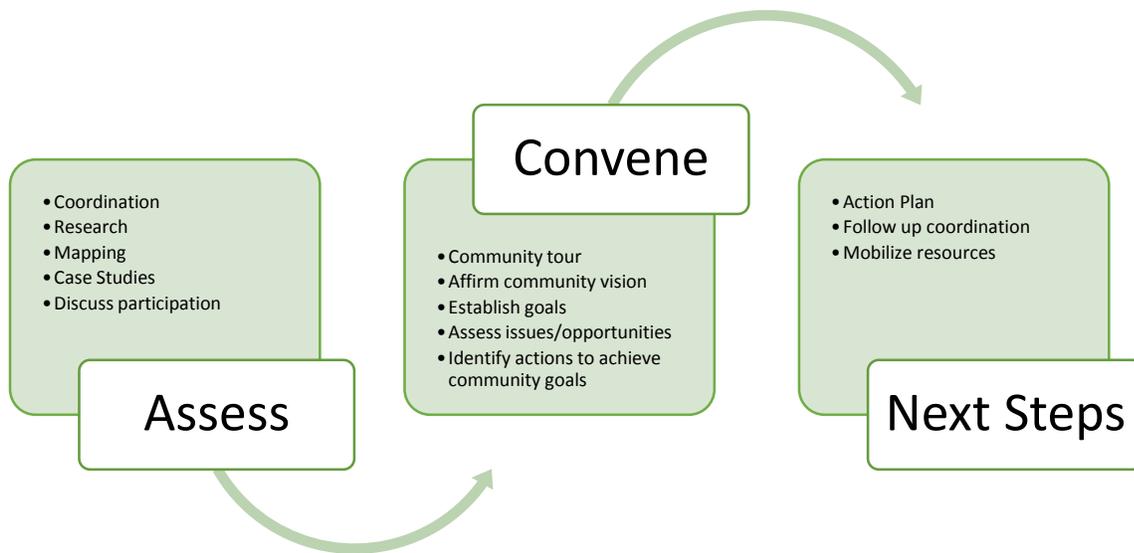


Figure 3 – Technical Assistance Process Diagram

The workshop was held May 5-6, 2015 at the Tuskegee Housing Authority (THA) Life Development Center (LDC). Federal agencies participating in the workshop included United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), and the US Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). The workshop was well attended by all community partners listed in Figure 1 and Appendix C of this report.

The Community Tour

The workshop began on the afternoon of May 5th, with a community tour of key sites, projects and partners in Tuskegee. It began at the historic court square downtown and involved a discussion of all the revitalization efforts being made to support main street businesses, historic facades, and events such as the George Washington Carver Commemorative Festival. Lawrence “Tony” Haygood of the TMCCDC spoke of their numerous projects and of the work of Tuskegee Main Street. The next stop included the Macon County Farmers Market just a few blocks north of Downtown, which is a sturdy and attractive permanent structure built on City land



Figure 4 – Tony Haygood giving part of the community tour in the downtown square (Credit: Alan Steinbeck)

with USDA funds. Adjacent to the Farmers Market pavilion is a community garden, founded and operated by the Carver Integrative Sustainability Center (CISC) and students of the University. The tour continued to the Tuskegee University Carver Integrative Sustainability Center, which houses the USDA Rural Development and Extension staff. The tour included a visit to the offices of the Tuskegee-Macon County Community Development Corporation (TMCCDC) and the Tuskegee Youth Safe Haven. It concluded with a stop at the former daycare center which was donated by the Tuskegee Housing Authority to the Macon County Ministers Council (MCMC). The building currently houses the Minister’s Council food pantry, which distributes food monthly over 150 families in need, and is slated for renovation to become a new food hub. The vision of the food hub is for expansion of the pantry operations, community gardens, a commercial kitchen, a food truck, an attractive community center, and the renovation of the existing facility into a community kitchen and entrepreneurial training center. A number of community events and meals have already been held there by the Mobile Studio in partnership with the Ministers Council. The building, though not downtown, is adjacent to the largest low-income residential neighborhood in the county, with more than 160 homes. Maps of the tour sites and community food assets are available in Appendix B of this report.

The community tour was followed by visioning, brainstorming, and action-planning discussions among a diverse group of citizens and local, state and federal stakeholders. These discussions helped participants identify the community values that underlie the action plan for their local food initiatives, and also clarified how local foods can help make Tuskegee and Macon County healthier, more resilient, and contribute to economic vibrancy.

Vision and Values

The first night of the workshop began with an enthusiastic welcome from Johnny Ford, the Mayor Tuskegee, who expressed support for the initiatives. The consultant team then introduced the topics and program overview with a short presentation. This was followed by exercises where workshop participants shared core values and beliefs around food system, economic, and downtown development. Values drive aspirations for the future, and voicing them was critical to action planning the following day. Facilitators asked participants to say something they believed about their community in general, and then about local and healthy food in Tuskegee and Macon. Workshop participants valued that their community is:



Figure 5 – Workshop at the Life Development Center (Credit: Alan Steinbeck)

- The best place on earth – a rare and special place that is a national treasure for African Americans;
- A talent center on a number of topics, that will be a national example for local food hubs and is already an example for other community development initiatives;
- A place where it is in our DNA to succeed – where George Washington Carver taught us to care for ourselves;
- A place where we have a mind of our own – where Booker T. Washington set the tone for economic development in African American communities; and
- A home to many wise and compassionate people who think not only of themselves, but of the needs of others.

The community and its people:

- Will not do it alone, being committed to collaborating with others from around the state and country;
- Will keep growing and evolving as has been happening over the past 10 years; and
- Will ensure that tomorrow’s kids eat better than the kids of today, understanding that children are the seeds that will grow our people.

When asked about the local food system and healthy foods, members of the group said that they:

- Are another way to gain power together, leading to more productive lives and positive community outcomes;
- Can be grown by us, creating a better supply of food and improving the local economy;
- Are full of opportunity to gain wisdom, as growing food and gardening are full of complicated lessons; and
- Will allow people to improve their health and feel better about themselves, enhancing their physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing.

They expressed the need to:

- Repair the disconnect with the soil among African Americans – a legacy of ending the institution of slavery, but not fully healing our relationship with the land and the process of making it productive;
- Regain what we have lost as an agricultural community – with a direct relationship to each other and the food that we eat;
- Keep the legacy of agricultural production and innovation alive locally, looking back at the past as a model;
- Recognize the call to this work that is embodied in George Washington Carver’s blueprints for humanity, which still resonate today;
- Create a food hub for the region, bringing forth a positive transformation beyond our current imagination;
- Educate people of all ages about the value of eating healthy, local foods, believing that we will come to desire them highly; and
- Capitalize on the potential for people from all of the world to move here, focusing on the need to revitalize and rebuild the community – all the right ingredients are present.

Day one concluded with a review of the workshop goals, and a discussion focused on the direction action-planning would follow the next day. Day two began with more presentations by the consultant staff on best practices, criteria, and case studies of farmers markets and other food systems initiatives that similar communities have used to achieve their goals. The results of these mapping exercises are presented in Appendix B of this report. The final work session during the afternoon of day two was spent detailing the SMART goals next steps action plan.

Livability Principles Advanced by Action Plan

Provide More Transportation Choices

There have been existing initiatives to improve cycling and walking conditions on roads that bring people into town. Opportunity exists to expand on these recent efforts by connecting the various parts of town with the primary assets in the food network. The community has begun conversations with state and federal transportation agencies to further develop these concepts and to seek funding for related projects.

Promote Equitable, Affordable Housing

The food hub, which will include the community kitchen, educational facility, and enhanced food pantry operation, will greatly improve upon one of the major local public housing developments, making the neighborhood a more attractive place to live, and increasing the level of engagement and connectedness between community members.



Figure 6 – Local business in the town square of Tuskegee. (Credit: Alan Steinbeck)

Enhance Economic Competitiveness

Tuskegee is already competitive in its cultural and institutional resources, and its heritage of innovation and industry. The community may capitalize on this, communicating the value of the local foods in the economy, collaborating among community groups, and involving residents in the food network. The biggest opportunity for expansion at this point is in making more local foods available to local households. There is also the opportunity to be a national model of innovation - attracting interest, tourism, and economic and academic collaboration.

Support Existing Communities

Putting agricultural lands to work is part of an overall strategy to create efficient communities, and engender revitalization of the existing town. While little time was spent discussing this in the workshop, there are number of opportunities to develop new uses for existing buildings in town, reducing the need to expand the footprint of Tuskegee, and to make use of good land. The local food network will benefit from locally available land and lower prices.

Coordinate and Leverage Federal Policies and Investment

Workshop participants identified several opportunities for leveraging local, state, and federal funding sources in order to grow the local food network. Funding opportunities exist for new development and renovation, transportation facilities, and program development.

Value Communities and Neighborhoods

The actions listed in the next section focus on providing access to healthy, local foods; growing the local economy; and exploring efforts to expand the local food network. By making stronger connections to the university and its students, neighborhood residents, and by providing opportunities for gardening mentorship and volunteering, the farmers market and the emerging food hub can help to improve the social fabric and health of Tuskegee.

Action Plan

The primary product of the workshop is a strategic action plan for implementation. The plan is composed of goals, with actions that serve to meet those goals. Another purpose of the workshop was to further clarify, prioritize, and define roles and responsibilities for moving forward on these actions. The goals and actions that are part of this plan are summarized below and are contained in their full detail in Appendix A of this document.

GOAL 1: Formalize vision and governance/collaboration model for local food activities – a.k.a. “Made in Macon Enterprises.”

- Action 1.1: Establish and articulate vision for expanding local food network and share with community.
- Action 1.2: Determine best model for local food network governance.

GOAL 2: Create a sustainable local food hub/center by expanding current activities of the local pantry.

- Action 2.1: Identify program for co-op kitchen, including what type of equipment is needed
- Action 2.2: Create job description for all staff, volunteers, and other positions that support hub
- Action 2.3: Design and implement site improvements at the pantry, including parking access and community garden
- Action 2.4: Partner with local school system for Booker T. Washington equipment/kitchen

GOAL 3: Link food hub activities to educational, entrepreneurial, and training opportunities.

- Action 3.1: Contact individuals who have had success in food preparation to assist with educational and entrepreneurial aspects.
- Action 3.2: Link local extension programs to the Made in Macon initiative.
- Action 3.3: Distribute information to senior citizens and other groups about market and pantry.
- Action 3.4: Provide opportunities for youth to become stakeholders in food hub.
- Action 3.5: Form directory containing agencies that are connected to food production, preparation, and distribution.

GOAL 4: Strengthen the presence, programming, and strength of the existing farmers market

- Action 4.1: Include produce planted and harvested by youth in school gardens, coordinate crops produced.
- Action 4.2: Business plan marketing effort.
- Action 4.3: Formalize EBT capacity of the farmers market.
- Action 4.4: Co-operatives – circular flow of funds (membership fees).

GOAL 5: Resolve gaps in transportation networks and services that connect people with food.

- Action 5.1: Daly Street upgrade.
- Action 5.2: Separated shared-use path connecting food bank to downtown, deliveries by bicycle. Walking/bike connection between pantry and farmers market with rest area.
- Action 5.3: Wayfinding system.
- Action 5.4: Multi-modal station. Separated and shared path from downtown to MOTON

- Action 5.5: Food transport for residents disabled or without transportation.

Transportation and Connectivity

The working group that focused on transportation and connectivity discussed desired improvements. Food systems, food access, and economic vitality all depend on transportation and connectivity. Building on the idea that greater connectivity and wayfinding are key to strengthening the food system in Macon County, the Transportation Working Group proposed several multi-tiered transportation improvements to Tuskegee/Macon County.

A well-lit, buffered, and multi-modal right-of-way along Martin Luther King Boulevard (U.S. 80) is needed to connect Booker T. Washington High School, the Macon County Ministerial Council Food Pantry and Co-op Kitchen, and the Downtown Farmer’s Market. As a key central corridor within the City of Tuskegee, MLK Blvd. serves the downtown commercial corridor, the public high school, city government offices and borders the county government offices. Providing enhanced pedestrian and cycling opportunities along this corridor will increase commerce, promote sustainable, healthy travel and increase focus on the historic downtown.

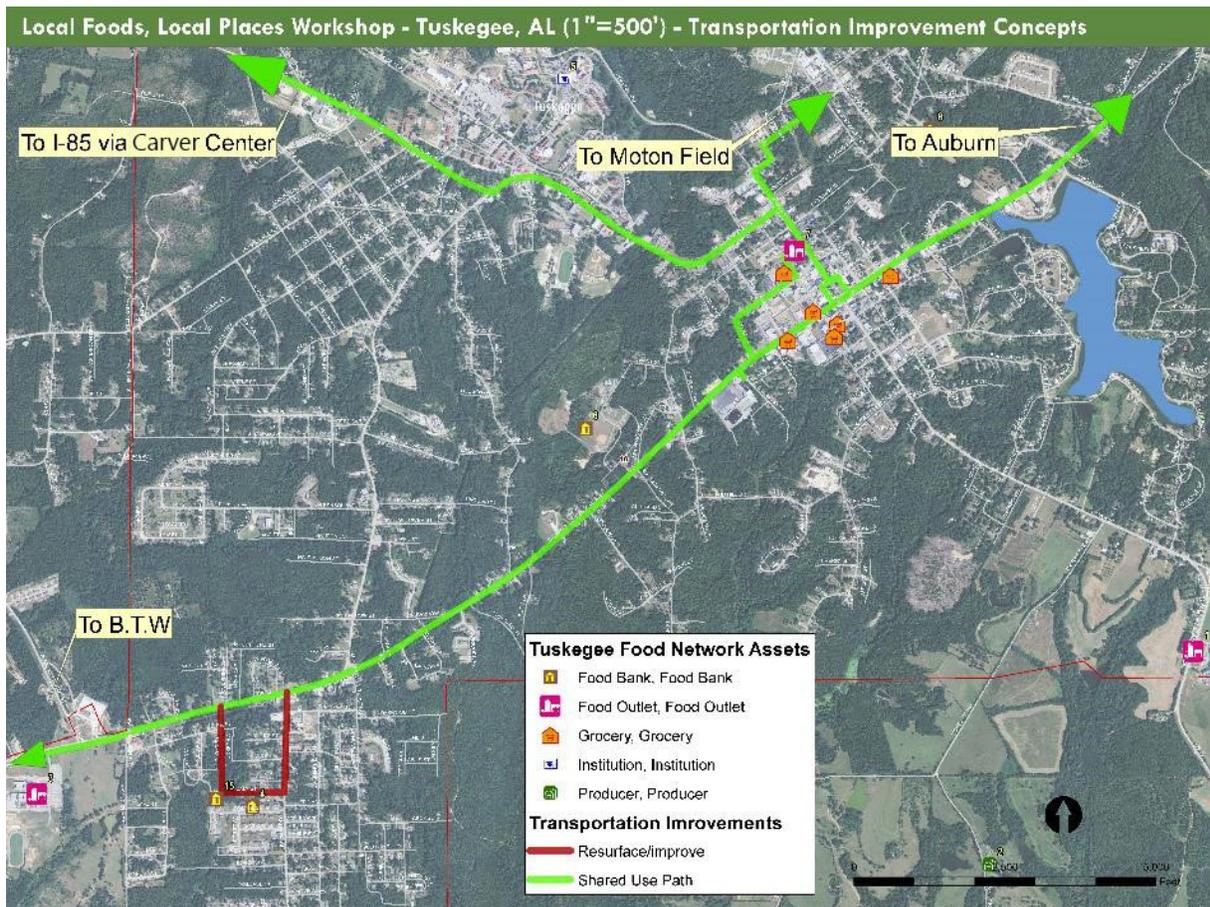


Figure 7 - Transportation Improvements Map (see higher resolution version in Appendix B)

Tuskegee is an important historic city and cultural hub. In order to facilitate greater access to, and appreciation of, the city’s many educational and tourism sites, the Transportation Working Group proposes connections via designated, marked, multi-modal transportation pathways. The George

Washington Carver Museum, The Oaks (home of Booker T. Washington), the Tuskegee Human & Civil Rights Multicultural Center, Moton Field (home of the Tuskegee Airmen), the historic landscapes of Tuskegee University, and Agricultural Experiment Station would all benefit from multimodal connections to the central Courthouse Square and foodways network.

At the regional level, the Transportation Working Group proposes capitalizing on the unique intersection of two historic highways: US Highway 29 and US Highway 80. The Transportation Working Group is collaborating with TMCDC and local governments to assess the potential for winning a TIGER Grant to fund the creation of multimodal pathways that connect Auburn, Tuskegee, and other sites within the region.

Implementation and Next Steps

Three post-workshop conference calls were held between May and July. The most notable post-workshop activities revolved around a group which named themselves “The Super Crew” (see Figure 8). This group is responsible for the application to the Appalachian Regional Commission and the Delta Regional Authority for implementation financing.

The Super Crew expanded from its original workshop participants to include a few stakeholders that held a more intimate knowledge of past management of the Macon County Farmer’s Market, and others with new energy for its sustained revival. It meets every other week, and more frequently if there are Market events.

The Super Crew has explored several options for next steps, including creating a new legal entity (e.g. non-profit, b-corp., etc.) to champion the farmer’s market and Made in Macon Enterprises. For now, it has settled on serving as a Macon County Food Systems Roundtable. There already exists a Farmer’s Market Consortium, on which several of The Super Crew members serve. There is also the Macon County Economic Development Authority that supports “Made in Macon” goods and businesses (especially industrial).

The Super Crew considered starting a “first Friday” evening market with music, crafts, cooked food etc., but decided to focus attention on the existing Saturday

The “Super Crew”

- Dr. Luciena Dunn, Director of the Tusk-Mac Community Foundation (TCCF)
- Tony Haygood, CDC and Mayor Pro-tem
- Georgette White Moon, Tuskegee City Councilwoman
- Matthew Steele, Small Farmer near Shorter
- Guy Trammell, Director of Tuskegee Youth Safe Haven
- Mary Kenbro, Elder and Community Activist
- Jocelyn Zanzot and Daniel Neil MOBILE STUDIO
- Jayme Oates
- Cookie Jones, local businessman/baker
- Marion Garmon, TCCF
- Raymon Shange, Carver Center for Integrative Sustainability at Tuskegee University
- Josie Bhatamosie, local blueberry farmer
- Lindsey Lunsford, Project Coordinator for the Tuskegee United Leadership and Innovation Program (TULIP)
- Shari Williams, Director of the Ridge Interpretive Center, Warrior
- Pastor KG Jones, former head of the Macon County Farmer’s Market Association
- Bernice L Frazier, Health Care Authority
- Millicent Braxton, Carver Center for Integrative Sustainability at Tuskegee University
- Four TU interns through the summer dedicated to Market Business, advertising, analysis and growth
- Others that have attended include Mr. Parish, State Farmers Market and Mr. Baldwin, Market overseer .

Figure 8 - The follow up “The Super Crew”

market, rather than compete or confuse with new events. Members are pursuing a better understanding of the funding needed to hire and sustain a farmer's market manager, and are discussing this with Dr. Hill, Dean of the College of Agriculture. Dr. Hill oversees the current position of Market Manager, which is currently fulfilled in half-capacity by Mr. Baldwin.

It was determined that Mobile Studio should manage the Made in Macon Enterprises, Co-Op Kitchen, and Design Workshop via the Tusk-Mac Community Dev. Corp. in alignment with TU and, specifically, a fall construction, science, and architecture class. The Super Crew will focus on the bigger picture of supporting the farmer's market and connecting the dots between the Kitchen, the county, downtown revitalization, and the market.

Delta Regional Authority funding will be used to design, plan, and manage the Community Kitchen renovation. \$20,000 will cover the costs of engineered remodeling design plans for the Daly Street facility in collaboration with faculty from the Robert R. Taylor College of Architecture and Construction Science at Tuskegee University.

Appalachian Regional Council funding will be used for Community Kitchen renovation and equipment. The kitchen will be outfitted, first and foremost, to prepare nutritious, ready-to-eat meals for people who need the food pantry. Equipment such as an oven and dehydrator will be necessary. Equipment costs will be offset with additional grants and donations, and through business partnerships. Also functioning as a commercial kitchen for local entrepreneurs, the Made in Macon kitchen will enable community members to add value to locally-grown produce, and to market local products regionally.

The surplus division of the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA) will partner with the Tuskegee Housing Authority's Ridgewood Neighborhood Community Kitchen and Food Pantry to supply critical resources. As a statewide agency, ADECA provides groups across Alabama with both equipment and systems support.

The Tuskegee Housing Authority further qualifies for the Renew 300 Federal Project, which aims to equip federal housing projects community facilities with renewable energy systems. To offset the increase in power generated by the Community Kitchen and to build capacity with solar electric system design, installation, maintenance, and this project will pursue an upcoming DOE/HUD grant.

Appendices

- Appendix A – Implementation Action Plan Tables
- Appendix B – Transportation Recommendations Map
- Appendix C – Workshop Participants and Post Workshop Planning Group
- Appendix D– Presentation Slides
- Appendix E– Workshop Photo Album
- Appendix F – Funding Resources
- Appendix G – References